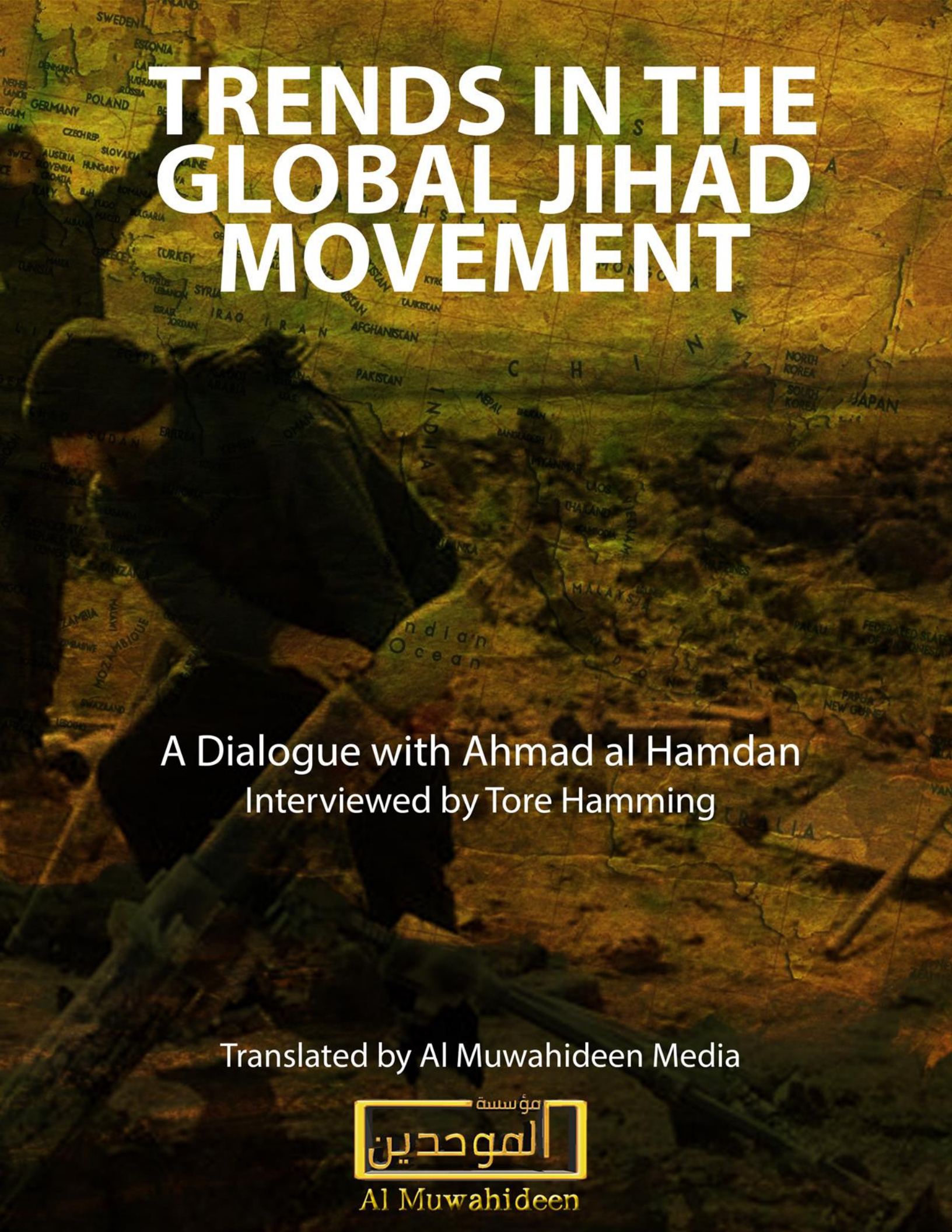




TRENDS IN THE GLOBAL JIHAD MOVEMENT

A Dialogue with Ahmad al Hamdan
Interviewed by Tore Hamming

Translated by Al Muwahideen Media



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ABOUT AHMED AL HAMDAN

The interviewee in this book Ahmed Al Hamdan is the author of the widely esteemed and celebrated book 'Methodological Differences Between ISIS and Al Qaida - Who are the ones that deviated?' This book is a scholarly analysis of the differences between the methodology of ISIS and Al Qaida based on their official sources, and it answers the question 'Who are the ones that deviated' from the path of their predecessors from amongst the former leaders of Al Qaida who sometimes are referred to as the followers of the Salafi Jihadist trend. The purpose of this book was to analyze the truth of the claims made by Abu Mohammed Al Adnani, the official spokesman of ISIS then, who claimed that Al Qaida today under the leadership of Sheikh Ayman Al Zawahiri has deviated from the path of Sheikh Usama Bin Laden which it had trodden when he was alive. This book is one of the best written works on the subject and it has become widely popular amongst many researches who research on the topic. The importance of this book can be seen when looked at the fact that attempts have been made to translate this book into nearly ten different languages from the English translation of the original Arabic version and it has been translated into Russian, Turkistani, Urdu, Indonesian languages and works have been undertaken to translate it into other languages such as Somali, Swahili, French and German.

In this interview, Ahmed Al Hamdan gives an insight into the turning points in the Jihadi movement spearheaded by Al Qaida and contested by ISIS and the areas of their contest as well as the mistakes committed by them which caused a setback in their progress.

However, in order for the readers to know more about the author, here is a brief background of the author and the Islamic scholars who have recommended and approved of him. Ahmed Al Hamdan says "I was born in 1992 and am living in Bahrain. I graduated from Shaykh Abdullah bin Eesa Aal Khalifa as Senaa'iyah school. Then I studied in the University of Applied Sciences, specializing in political science which I am still undergoing. As for the scholars and students of knowledge who I studied with and got Tazkiyyah (approval) from, the most important of them are:

- **Shaykh Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi** who has given me Ijazah (approval and recommendation) for most of his narrations.
- **Shaykh Abu Qatada al Filistini** who wrote a forward to the Arabic edition of my book 'Methodological Differences Between ISIS and Al Qaeda -Who are the ones that deviated?'
- **Shaykh Umar al Hadoochi** who gave me Ijazah for all of his narrations.
- **Shaykh Dr. Safa Diyaa al Adawi** who was one of the top leaders of the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets, and who would be delegated by Sheikh Usama Bin

Laden to settle the issues amongst the Mujahideen. I attended his lectures on 'Fath al-Baari Sharh Saheeh al Bukhari'.

- **Shaykh Saadiq Abdullah al Haashemi** who is a student of Shaykh Sulaymaan al Ulwaan. Al Ulwaan would appoint him to take classes on his behalf when he would not be present.
- **Shaykh Dr. Abdullah al Muhaysini**

Besides I was also with Turki Bin'ali (one of the senior major religious cleric of ISIS) for almost two and a half years, and studied with him Aqeedah, Usool ul Fiqh and Hadeeth.

And others.

Regarding how I adopted the path that I am presently in, to start with, I was raised as a child moving to and from the Salafi institutions for memorizing the Quran (Jame'iyat at-Tarbiyyatul Islamiyyah) and the summer institutions of the Muslim Brotherhood (Jame'iyat al-Islaah). However, after all this I was not inclined to being religious, and I did not adhere to it until the final year of secondary school. After I began adhering to it I began reading a lot of history and politics and sometimes even literature. And there was a forum linked to Al Jazeera channel in which every Islamic, political, military and ideological and theological group was present and there used to be long and heated discussions. Through these discussions, you would see which one out of the two sides was stronger in their arguments. Then I came upon the account of a woman, who I do not know until today, who had in her signature a link to "Archive of Jihad" which is a website where all the Jihadi releases since the 80's until the latest release had been gathered and put in. In fact, from this site I was able to watch most of the bigger Jihadi releases besides the military operations.

I probably never believed in considering weapons as an option because the newspapers and television were making it appear that there were only one or two military actions happening during the week and we would rarely hear of continuous operations against the US occupation both in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that gave the impression that there is no use of military operations if they are so little and which are not able to change anything. However, when I went to that site under the section "Statements", I saw in it that there would be 10 military operations a day! And 300 military operations during the month!!!! So, this aroused a hope within me and I said "yes, we can".

And through this I came to know a little about the military activities of the Jihadi groups. Yet the problem remained about knowing the Islamic and Shariah basis upon which these military actions stood. When I got to know Turki al-Bin'ali he advised me to download the file 'Haqeebat al Mujahid - 3 (The Briefcase of the Mujahid - 3)'¹ which is a

¹ 'Haqeebatul Mujahideen (The Briefcase of the Mujahid) 3', is an individual effort by Abu Zubayr al Ghazzi and the size of the file is around 2 GB, but 'The Briefcase of the Mujahid 4' is a collective effort by various groups within the

file which was compiled by the brother Abu Zubayr al Ghazzi - who is currently serving as a religious official in Jabhat Fath al Sham - which includes all the Jihadi books, articles, letters, Fatwas, statements, refutations, magazines and pamphlets released in Arabic, all contained in one '.rar' file, both that which were released by Jihadi groups and by individuals. And I used to spend my spare time by reading from this 'Haqeebat' (briefcase). And the matter which would be hard for me to understand would be explained by Bin'ali to me. So, with that I put my feet in the Jihadi sea".

Jihadi movement and has increased in size to around 17 GB. However, the Briefcase 4 has not been published in the internet and is in the possession of a small group in northern Syria, and sometimes Abu Zubayr al Ghazzi would give it to someone who visits him on a hard disk or flash drive.

1

ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE GLOBAL JIHAD TOTAL WAR

Interviewer: Back in 2014, the Islamic State (IS) was winning territory while IS affiliated media and its official spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani were extremely active propagating its successes. In the meantime, Al-Qaeda (AQ) leader Ayman al-Zawahiri remained quiet. Now, in mid-2016, it seems to be the opposite situation as IS is losing territory, while al-Adnani is increasingly absent from the media scene. Zawahiri, on the other hand, has lately been very active with several speech series e.g. 'The Islamic Spring and Brief Messages to a Victorious Ummah'. What does this development tell you?

Ahmed Al Hamdan: This is due to several reasons. Firstly, during the period in which Adnani came out several times, there were several successes achieved by this group such as them conquering large areas of Iraq and Syria and the opening of branches outside the region of Iraq and Syria. Normally when commercial companies make any profit, they exploit these profits for strengthening their advertising and marketing. So, the multiple appearances of Adnani during that period is a normal thing and in accordance with the circumstances which his group was going through at that time. However as for Zawahiri appearing only rarely, there are a number of reasons such as:

Firstly, Al Fajr Centre (the media forum for the Mujahideen) which releases publications of all the branches of Al-Qaeda contained within its ranks people who were sympathetic to the Islamic State. And these people would delay any verbal attack that would be launched from any branch of Al-Qaeda. And they would delay any correspondence relating to the same matter and would even send it to the leaders of ISIS and then the leaders of ISIS would make preemptive attacks in advance to absorb the effect of the publication of Al-Qaeda that was sent to Al Fajr Centre to be released. An example of this is the seventh interview by As-Sahab Foundation with Sheikh Ayman al Zawahiri which got published under the title 'The reality between pain and hope'. They released the speech of Adnani 'This was not our methodology and it will never be' before releasing the interview, and also the release of this seventh interview by As-Sahab Foundation with Dr. Zawahiri was delayed for around twelve days, even though the date of this interview by As-Sahab was before the speech of Adnani. But the speech of Adnani got released before it. So, Al Fajr Centre played the biggest role in transforming the sympathy of many in the Jihadi movement to make them support the

Islamic State through this manipulation by them, in addition to Al Fajr center turning to be a defense for ISIS.

And when the well-known Jihadi researcher, Abdullah bin Muhammad, wrote about the possibility of the ranks of ISIS being infiltrated as had happened in the Algerian Jihad, this Centre took an unusual step of issuing an official statement. They falsified this man and accused him of lying. And so, the branches of Al-Qaeda began to ignore this Centre and they changed their means of publication by using their own two media delegates in the social media sites in a direct manner. For example, the account 'Abdullah al Mujahid' belongs to Al-Qaeda of Yemen, and 'Abu Mus'ab Ash-Shanqiti' belongs to Al Qaeda of Khurasan. And so, they began to release all the publications directly without having the need for any intermediaries.

And what must be noted is that these are not exclusive information that are known only to those close to these sources, but they are known to anyone who used to follow the Jihadi forums. And the reality is just as a friend had said, that the Jihadi groups and their media establishments were like closed boxes which not even those close to them would know as to what they contained inside them. However, the Fitna (tribulation) of ISIS caused every secret to become publicly known. And I don't say known only to the supporters of these groups but also to all the people. This relieved the intelligence and the security agencies a lot, and so they no longer have to tire themselves much like how it was in the past in order to know what is inside the house of their enemy. Thus, there occurred polarization between two competitors and each would speak publicly on secret issues causing the other party to be the accused one which would make them want to defend themselves. And so, they too would speak publicly about secret issues. Due to this rivalry, a lot of secrets became publicly known. And all praise belongs to Allah in every case.

Secondly, another matter is that Al-Qaeda needed to get its internal ranks to be set in order after they got swept by a tide. Previously there had been elements within Al-Qaeda who were sympathetic towards the Islamic State but now the matter has developed and these sympathizers began to pledge allegiance to the Islamic state. And they began to promote it from inside the ranks of Al-Qaeda. So, it would not be wise at such a time to come out in public frequently and release statements while your internal ranks have become flimsy and shaky. The priority was to rectify the internal ranks and absorb this attack. And in fact, because of the stupidity of ISIS in taking the initiative in attacking the leaders of Al Qaeda in their other branches and slandering them and spreading doubtful allegations which would reach to the point of Takfeer upon them, this contributed to the awareness of some of those who were deceived by ISIS previously and they said that yes, it is true that we differ with Al Qaeda in some issues, but not to the extent of Takfeer.

Yet despite that, I used to think and still now think that the role of Al Qaeda's media was negative to some extent because of them continuing to have hopes that ISIS would return back to the right path. Also from the mistakes committed by the media of Al Qaeda in general was to not confront in an official manner the charges made against them by ISIS. For example, Abu Ubaida Al-Lubnani who was the former security official of Al-Qaeda before being expelled and giving the pledge of allegiance to ISIS, was one of the members of Al-Qaeda of Khurasan, and he had written his testimony in the official publication of ISIS known as 'An-Naba'. And then his former friend known as Abu Kareemah wrote an article in refutation to his testimony, but this was done in his individual capacity through the website of 'Justpaste', and he made evident many of the lies and contradictions that were present in this testimony.

However, I ask, which would have a greater impact - when the group Al-Qaeda officially adopts this article and publishes it through a media wing, or when its author publishes it by himself on his own capacity? By this, you will cause people to ask as to what is the evidence that Abu Kareemah is actually a Mujahid from Khurasan? And what is the evidence that he is the actual author of this article? There is no doubt that the people will take the official publication as being more credible. On the other hand, we see that in every issue of 'Dabiq', ISIS would heap allegations against Al-Qaeda even to the point of saying that they are agents and disbelievers, while the official media of Al-Qaeda represented by their two magazines 'Resurgence' and 'Inspire' would completely avoid responding to these allegations and would be content with the writings of some of the leaders and soldiers who would publish them in an unofficial manner.

And if I was a simple Jihadi follower, I would interpret the lack of official response by Al-Qaeda as a weakness in their standpoint, and I would not interpret this as a desire to not escalate the matter so as to not cut off the road for ISIS to come back to the right path. Rather I would say ***"If the talk that is being spread regarding this matter is not correct then they would have responded to it at the earliest"***. But this is a mistaken policy which contributed to increasing the number of ISIS followers from amongst the Jihadi supporters.

With regards to the frequent appearances of Dr. Ayman lately, I sat down with my companions and I said to them ***"Let us think in the way how the men of intelligence agencies think. Can it be reasonable that these speeches are recent ones? That is, they are published just a few days after been recorded? Or are they all recorded before some weeks, if not months, and then published gradually?"*** Obviously, it is the second one that is correct. And it is never wise in terms of security for the one who is number one in the wanted list of the security agencies to publish his statement in close intervals as this strengthens the chances of getting hold of the link in the thread which will lead towards him. The security official of Al-Qaeda, Abdullah

Adam² has said *“Two people who keep moving will definitely meet each other at some point”*. But when you decrease the movement, then there is a greater level for your safety.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF ANSWER BY TORE HAMMING:

In the early stage after the Islamic State left the al-Qaida network (or was thrown out depending on the perspective), it won the fight both on the battlefield and in the media. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri simply did not respond forcefully enough as the fitna erupted. In this regard, however, it is interesting to consider the position and influence of the Jihadi media foundations. If the account Ahmed Al-Hamdan gives of the Al Fajr Centre's role in delaying Zawahiri's attempt of responding to the attacks from the Islamic State holds true, this would point to a critical interference of the media foundations. Interestingly, Al Fajr was also accused of refusing to publish Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's response (titled 'Remaining in Iraq and the Levant', 14 June 2013) to Zawahiri's ruling that the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham should remain in Iraq only. If both stories are true, it shows an ambiguous role of Al Fajr, fighting an internal struggle to choose side.

Al Hamdan's account also pinpoints another important factor in order to grasp Zawahiri's initial passivity. Due to the increasing sympathy towards the Islamic State within al-Qaida, Zawahiri needed to get his house in order before publically taking a stance. Had he been too explicit in his critique of the Islamic State at this point, he would have risked to push away many al-Qaida members. This probably happened anyway though as his passive approach was interpreted as weakness by many.

Perhaps al-Qaida did not realize the seriousness of the situation quickly enough. Whereas the Islamic State utilized all channels of communication and propaganda as efficiently as possible, al-Qaida was hesitant and too conservative (well they are Salafis after all) in their communication instead of empowering its followers through the use of official media centers. On this point, Ahmed Al Hamdan is correct.

In summary, as the Islamic State challenged al-Qaida neither Zawahiri nor his organization were prepared to counter the aggressiveness of its renegade affiliate. Baffled by the context where it found itself abandoned by its media foundations and its followers, al-Qaida was left in the backseat. But the tide is changing. The Islamic State has less and less to brag about, while Zawahiri is taking the position of the old wise man, who is following a long-term strategy, slowly attracting public support and taking

² The series “Manufacturers of terrorism”, lesson three

back followers from the Islamic State. This is evident from the number of public statements from the two organizations' leaders. While statements from Baghdadi or Adnani (before his death) have become increasingly rare, Zawahiri has released two series of speeches (first 'The Islamic Spring' series followed by 'Brief Messages to a Victorious Ummah') recently, giving the impression that he is now once again the main authority within the Global Jihadi movement.

AHMED AL HAMDAN RESPONDS TO ANALYSIS AND ELABORATES ON THE ROLE OF THE JIHADI MEDIA

The release 'Remaining in Iraq and Sham' by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi had been previously published by the Islamic State independently, and it is capable of spreading its material quickly and directly. And this is different to the one who has committed himself to method of publishing specifically through Al Fajr Centre. So if this person wants to change his policy it will take him a long time to search for alternative means and he must increase his security before replacing the method of publication. Those who sympathized with the State within Al Fajr Centre took advantage of the fact that the Centre was the only source for spreading the material of Al-Qaeda to delay or even prevent the arrival of communications between the different branches of Al-Qaeda concerning the matter of the Islamic State. And I will give some examples:

The brother Abu Umar al Najdi is a Mujahid from Yemen who wrote under the name 'The loyal companion' on twitter and was recommended by the other Mujahideen from Yemen who were present on twitter, for example 'Mohamed al Malaki' who is one of the Mujahideen who had previously been in Afghanistan and then went to Yemen. This person published a confidential letter which had been sent from a veteran leader of Al-Qaeda who was present in Syria i.e. Muhsin Al-Fadli, to the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. He said in it:

"Attached with this letter is the letter of Shaykh Abu Khalid al Suri, may Allah accept him, which he sent to Dr. Ayman during the first day of the Fitna, also the statements and the claims of both Al Nusra and The State [IS] which I have previously sent to Dr. Ayman, may Allah protect him, and the audio message of Al-Jawlani clarifying the causes of the problem and also the audio witness testimony of (.....) and Abu Azeez al Qatari. And for your information I have sent it to you again despite having sent it before through (.....) who is the representative of the leader of Al Fajr Centre – I sent it to you again to make sure that it would reach you."

Abu Umar al-Najdi said, commenting in the margin of this letter about the text:

The attachments and testimonies which the writer of the letter sent at the beginning of the Fitna of the State by way of Al Fajr Centre, never arrived to Shaykh Abu Baseer [Wuhayshi] and only arrived with this letter. And he warned everyone to be careful in dealing with Al Fajr Centre and there are suspicious and frightening dealings which did not come from new members, rather from the senior members within the centre. And Allahs refuge is sought.

This explains why the branch in Yemen stopped publishing articles through al Fajr Centre and instead began publishing through their own representative 'Abdullah Mujahid'

So, if the Islamic State had not been able to publish their material in any way other than through Al Fajr Centre and despite that the Centre did not publish their material, then at that time we would be able to have doubt and ask if it was true that those people were really sympathetic to the State?

Interestingly, my opinion matches his opinion regarding the reason why fighters went over into the ranks of the Islamic State. And look what this leader said to Abu Baseer:

Now the third generation of the Mujahideen are influenced by the thinking of the State and this is due to a number of reasons, including the strength of the State media, another reason being the silence of the leaders of Al-Qaeda and the absence of clarifying the methodological mistakes of the State, making the youth of the Nation go to them and here the Nation has lost out by the silence of the Jihadi movement about these errors. And may Allah reward you with good for publishing the statement of Shaykh Harith al Nadhari as it clarified and made plain many rulings, however while we have now spoken of the reality, it has unfortunately come too late. And why did you not previously speak out and clarify the ruling about the fake Khilafah of Al Baghdadi. This is necessary for us to restore the confidence of the rational, confident and self-assured youth of the Ummah in Al Qaeda, so don't postpone the speech beyond its time in order to take a neutral position as this policy is no longer going to work in the face of the behavior and folly of the state.

2

THE FUTURE APPROACH OF AL-QAEDA

Interviewer: In July 2016, *Jabhat al-Nusra* broke away from AQ and established *Jabhat Fatah ash-Shaam* with the blessing of the senior AQ leadership. In his most recent speech (Brief Messages to a Victorious Ummah-4) al-Zawahiri furthermore encouraged Jihadi factions in Iraq to unify and fight IS and Iran. Is the approach of a popular front not necessarily with allegiance to AQ, but simply being sympathetic to the movement, becoming the future for AQ?

Ahmed Al Hamdan: There is a mistake in the question, as al-Zawahiri did not seek the factions in Iraq to unite to fight the Islamic state, not in episode 4 nor in any part of the series.

Secondly: we must understand that wars and battles are magnets which attract Jihadi thinkers and I do not think that you would find a battle front or any popular movement whose people are not sons of the Jihadi movement. And we must understand that Al-Qaeda do not look to the matter from the perspective of upholding its name and achieving its organizational goals and if that was indeed the case, then they would not have accepted the breaking of ties with al-Nusra for the benefit of the Muslims in Syria.

Generally, Al-Qaeda feel that its presence in some of the fields is a hindrance and that it is used as a justification by the enemies to give a pretext for international forces to intervene. And we believe that the West does not just have a problem with what it calls terrorism, rather it has a problem with any Islamic project. When it is announced that Al-Qaeda is present in any geographical area you cannot be certain of this claim. However, when the West have no other excuse to intervene and suppress the Islamic projects then it will enter and strike the Islamic groups when this claim (of an Al-Qaeda presence) can be reasonably verified.

And Al-Qaeda do not like to announce their presence in some areas for a number of reasons:

1. To expose the Western enemies' hostility to every Islamic project and show that their problem is with Islam and the establishment of the Shariah and not with a specific group, and to remove the usual argument used by the Western countries for intervention.

2. To find more room to maneuver, and to create places to move financial support and aid - meaning you will not find some traders in some of the states because there is a difficulty finding support in needy States in which battles and war are taking place. Likewise, you will not find some of the independent support, that is that it will be difficult to assist you or support the Jihadi groups in a region in which you are fighting, due to fear of being described with or connected with terrorism.³
3. Stopping the Western countries from being able to cause provocation between the factions as some of the factions will accuse a specific group because of its alleged affiliation to Al-Qaeda. The world has mobilized against us and that is the reason for the complexity of our cause, and there is problems and enmity between groups, and the enemy benefits from this from the beginning and so Al-Qaeda does not reveal itself.

These matters are not my own conclusions, rather they have been mentioned by Al-Qaeda leaders themselves and those close to them. For example:

Shaykh Ayman al Zawahiri said ***"the guidance from the general command was that we do not publicly announce the presence of Al Qaeda in Syria and this matter was agreed even with our brothers in Iraq and so we were surprised by the announcement which has provided the Syrian regime and the Americans a chance which they hoped for, then this will cause the normal people of Syria to ask: what is with this al Qaeda that they have brought disaster upon us? Is Bashar not enough? Do you want to bring the Americans upon us also?"***⁴

Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Libi said in his letter to Majeed al-Majeed, the leader of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades about the beginning of armed actions in Syria: ***"I have written about that to the brothers in the Islamic State more than a few times regarding some outlines and to summarize the points which were made: there is not to be any public appearance there under the name of any Jihadi group, especially those which are famous and well known"***⁵

And the leadership of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib said in 'The Azwad Document' after taking control of the northern part of Mali: ***"And the third benefit: lies in mitigating upon ourselves external and international pressure and it is extremely important that we look at our Islamic project in Azwad as one that begins small***

³ For example the two Kuwaiti Shaykhs who are both Mujahideen veterans issued a [statement](#) on the 14th of March 2016 seeking in it the breaking of ties between Jabhat al Nusra and Al Qaeda and they gave reasons saying: *"The benefit of a merge between Jabhat al Nusra and other factions, many who are qualified to do so and have the right to. Also, to transform the Jihad from the Jihad of a group to the Jihad of an Ummah and to create freedom of movement for Jihadi supporters as the name Al Qaeda as a bogeyman enables the hypocrites chase them and harass them"*

⁴ The seventh meeting with As Sahaab Foundation entitled: *"Reality, between pain and hope"* May 2014.

⁵ Letter to Shaykh Majeed al-Majeed P.4, 10th March 2012.

and in front of it there are many stages which it must pass through to be able to mature and become strong. And presently it is still in its early days crawling on its knees and it has not yet stood upon its feet. So is it wise to begin now by loading it down with weights which will totally transform it before it stands upon its feet, in fact this may lead to choking and preventing its breath. If we really want it to stand upon its feet in this world full of enemies and predators, then we must make things easy on it and take its hand and help it to stand. So, based upon this view we adopt the understanding of neutralizing opponents and avoiding provocation, hostility and the policy of agitating the enemies"⁶

So, I think that adopting this policy was why the Al-Qaeda branch which was ruling took the name 'Ansar-ad-Deen' instead of Al-Qaeda so as to avoid provocation and antagonizing and irritating the enemies. And in fact the absence of the name Al-Qaeda allowed many preachers to issue statements in condemnation of the French invasion of Mali without the difficulty of this being used to link them to Al-Qaeda. And so you are able to get people supporting Al-Qaeda without them knowing, or else they know and there is nothing to prevent them.

And in the first Abbottabad Papers, Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin advised Al-Shabab al-Mujahideen to conceal their connection to Al-Qaeda and he stated the reason and said: ***"it will increase the vigilance of the opponents against you if the issue is public, as happened with the brothers in Iraq and Algeria. And the second matter: some of the Muslims in Somalia are suffering from extreme poverty and malnutrition as a result of the ongoing war in their country and so I would urge you to listen to one of my speeches in the gulf states on effective and important development projects which are not expensive and which we previously tested in Sudan. So if the Mujahideen do not appear publicly to be united with Al Qaeda then this will strengthen the position of businessmen who want to help their brothers in Somalia and bring success to these projects to relieve hardship from the dispersed Muslims in Somalia and ensure the survival of the people amongst including the Mujahideen"***⁷

As for the future of Al-Qaeda and that which Al-Qaeda wants? Do they want to control and subject everyone to them? Or do they want to be part of any new Islamic government through mutual consent with other groups?

The foundational strategy of Al-Qaeda is not to establish an Islamic state in the presence of a strong cohesive international system and in the first Abbottabad papers Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin spoke a lot about this strategy and here is some of his words: ***"we must keep in mind at this time that organized work to establish a***

⁶ General guidelines for the Islamic Jihadist project in Azwad. P.5, 20th July 2012

⁷ The collected messages and directives of Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin, P.731, 6th August 2010

Muslim state begins by exhausting global disbelief as it has a strong hostility towards the establishment of any Islamic Emirate and what indicates the heightened hostility of the West to an Islamic emirate of any size is was the emirate of Shaykh al Khataabi which he established in Morocco before draining the crusaders to the point that they could not dominate the Muslim lands so the crusaders increased their power and surrounded the emirate in order to strike it. The head of global disbelief today has a large influence upon the countries of the region, it is their lifeblood and supporting base and has the power which enabled it to defeat Saddam and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, even though it was significantly weakened. Yet it still has the power to defeat the government of any true Islamic state in the region at this present time and so it is necessary to continue to drain and exhaust it, to the point where it is weak and is not able to defeat any state which is established. Then you must take into account the need to unite all the efforts and energies of the Muslims who refrained from jihad either with an excuse or without and then the establishing of a Muslim state is begun with the permission of Allah, and if needed the matter is delayed for a few years.”⁸

However, despite that it does not oppose the establishment of an Islamic state by other groups before such a time, but its own outlook and strategy is one of not establishing an Islamic state before the weakening or fall of the international system. For example, al-Qaeda did not reject the state of the Taliban and did not say we are against it because of the presence of the international community. On the contrary it supported this Muslim country even though it opposed its strategy about the creation of states.

Returning to the future of al Qaeda, does it want a state which exploits any popular movement and will use that popular movement in its interests? The answer is no. Al-Qaeda do not see this as a successful method for a number of reasons, such as:

1. Al Qaeda believe that any state which is established alone will not last long and will soon fall due to the enemies' ability to defeat it - as we will mention soon - and this failure would lead to alienation by the people and they would not help it again later. And this has been their outlook throughout the contemporary period. Abu Bashir al Wuhaishi sent a letter to Shaykh Usamah saying that the group in Yemen had the ability to enter Saana and take control of it and Shaykh Usamah replied to him " ***regarding what you have said about now being the time to enter Saana; we would like to establish Islamic law in it if we were capable of maintaining that, however while the main enemy has been weakened economically and militarily both before 9/11 and after it, it still has the ability to destroy any state which is established and so we don't want to put ourselves and our families in Yemen in that situation at this time,***

⁸ The collected messages and directives of Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin, P.767

before first preparing the conditions. And if we did that then we would be like the one who built a house in front of the torrent and if the river flowed through it then it would knock it down and then if we again wanted to rebuild the house a second time we would have alienated the people and they would not help us again".⁹

2. They do not have the ability to manage everything on their own and based on that Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Libi said to Abu Hamza al Muhajir "***know my beloved brother that the success of establishing a state cannot be achieved by your efforts alone no matter what you think about your adequacy and efficiency. And the matter is more great and serious so that it needs more than your efforts alone and its fronts are numerous and varied so include your brothers - who you know- within it, and there is no other way to do so except by your serious efforts in that. So make them a cornerstone in your project and included within its directives***"¹⁰
3. Your involvement of the other groups along with you in the management of the new state means the dispersion of the ranks of your enemy and so they will not be able to unite in the same way that they would be able to if you alone are in control.
4. Not to alienate other parties by excluding them as then they will turn on you or help the enemy. By allowing them to participate you then win them to your ranks. You will find that all of this is found in the speeches of the leaders of Al Qaeda, for example what was said by Shaykh Atiyatullah al-Libi to Shaykh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: "***Therefore, you, as a leader and a jihadist political organization who wants to destroy a power and a state and erect on its rubble an Islamic state, or at least form the building block on the right path towards that, need all of these people; and it is imperative for someone like this to get along with everyone in various degrees as well, for the brothers are of varying calibres, in my opinion. You also have the tribal leaders and the likes from the upper echelons of society, and they are of different levels as well, so the good among them who is close to us, we should consult them in some of our matters and give them value and give them some praise and involve them in some matters and vest them with some things because they love prestige. In this way we should try not to cause them to believe that we are going over their heads or infringing upon them in political and social leadership, or that we are overstepping them and not considering***

⁹ The first Abbottabad documents, index number: SOCOM-2012-0000016

¹⁰ Letter to Shaykh Abu Hamza al Muhajir P.3

them and not giving them value and not taking them into account. Rather, we should make them feel that we want to work with them to establish the religion, liberate the country and the people, establish the Islamic state and the rule of the Shariah of the Most Merciful etc. and that, in our opinion, they have a large role to play, as we need every Muslim and every person to play a part in this. In the meantime, we should call them to commit to the Shariah and to all that is best and of merit, and we should advise them against what is wrong and from all bad deeds, and we should try to perfect them and encourage them. Whenever the people feel that we value them and appreciate their efforts and that we respect them and want the best for them and that we sympathize with them, this is what will draw their hearts to us."¹¹

And Shaykh Ayman al Zawahiri also said to Al Zarqawi: ***"The Americans will exit soon, God willing, and the establishment of a governing authority-as soon as the country is freed from the Americans-is not dependent on force alone. Indeed, it's imperative that, in addition to force, there be an appeasement of Muslims and a sharing with them in governance and in the Shura council and in enjoining what is good and prohibiting what is evil. In my view-which I continue to reiterate is limited and has a distant perspective upon the events-this must be achieved through the people of the Shura and who possess authority to determine issues and make them binding, and who are endowed with the qualifications for carrying them out. They would be elected by the people of the country to represent them and overlook the work of the authorities in accordance with the rules of the glorious Sharia. And it doesn't appear that the Mujahedeen, much less the al Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers (Iraq), will lay claim to governance without the Iraqi people. Not to mention that that would be in contravention of the Shura methodology. That is not practical in my opinion."***¹²

And from the practical examples of this on the ground is the participation of the civilians from the people of Hadramaut in the local council to administer their area when Al-Qaeda in Yemen had control of that city.

And the leader of Al-Qaeda, Khalid Batarfi said in an interview with the editor and chief of the Mukalla Daily, Sand Baysob, in January 2015 when he was asked does the council in Hadramaut follow you. He answered:

"Your view about this people's council is wrong. This council meets itself and it consists of scholars of the city and its surroundings and we do not get involved in the formation of this council nor in choosing its members. All the people know

¹¹ Complete works of Shaykh Atiyatullah al Libi P.1791

¹² Letter to Abu Musab al Zarqawi P.9

the members from whom the council is chosen and they are from the scholars of the city and its surroundings. It is not a front for us as you have stated in the question, rather it is a separate entity which contributes to the management of the city and we have agreed with them on three basic items to work for:

- 1. That the reference is the Book and the Sunnah***
- 2. That the council is to administer the people***
- 3. That the council does not have links to any party or with any internal or external agenda***

And we were ready and still are ready to hand over all the city headquarters which the council needs for the administration of the city, however the council needed more time to arrange its paperwork and find enough strength to protect these facilities. So we began to surrender them gradually as requested and any delay was due to them and not to ourselves. We consider the involvement of the people of a land in the management of their land as a religious duty and it is included within the issue of consultation and so we will not dictate general matters of the nation and we will not give ourselves the right to determine such matters alone.”

And another example of that is the cooperation between Ansar-ad-Deen in Mali and the Azwad National Liberation Movement in their joint management to rule by the Shariah in the northern region of Mali and Al-Qaeda never considered ruling alone.¹³

And in summary: what is the situation or the future which Al-Qaeda want?

It is that there is an Islamic Caliphate established by election, consultation and the satisfaction of the people.

And it is not that Al-Qaeda imposes itself upon everyone else.

And the benefit for which Al-Qaeda works is not that of any group or a party, rather the benefit of the Islamic nation is placed before every other benefit, even if that is the benefit of the group itself. Based on that Shaykh Usama bin Ladin, May Allah have mercy upon him, said:

“The benefit of the group comes before the benefit of the individual and the benefit of the state comes before the benefit of the group and the benefit of the nation comes before the benefit of the state.”¹⁴

¹³ For the full terms of the joint agreement refer to the official statement released by Al Qaeda in the Magrib entitled "A media message and invitation" Dated Wednesday 3rd Rajib 1436 / April 22nd 2015 by Al Andalus Foundation.

¹⁴ The collected messages and directives of Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin, P.735

And based upon that benefit or end, it is necessary to participate alongside others and allow the nation to choose its ruler, not to impose yourself, as Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin said:

“And we Muslims believe that it is the right of the nation to choose its own leader and we believe in consultation.”¹⁵

And Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri said:

“And so we say clearly to our Muslim nation in general and our people in Syria specifically, that al Qaeda will never rob you of your right to choose the Muslim ruler whom you are pleased with, as established by the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of his prophet peace be upon him. And if Allah enables the ruling of Islam in Syria soon with his permission and if the Ummah chooses a ruler who establishes the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His prophet peace be upon him, then he is also our choice. Then after that we want all the Muslim Ummah to agree upon one Khalifah whom they are pleased with.”¹⁶

He also said:

“We have stated time and time again that if the people of Syria set up an Islamic government and chose for themselves a leader, then their choice is our choice, because we, by the grace of Allah, do not seek power, rather we seek the rule of the Shariah and we don't want to rule the Muslims but we want like the Muslims to be ruled by Islam. We have never stopped calling for the unity of the Mujahideen in Syria and their uniting upon the establishing of a guided Islamic Mujahid government which spreads justice and seeks consultation, which returns the rights and aids the weak and which upholds jihad and frees the lands, which strives to free Al Aqsa and revive the Khilafah upon the Prophetic methodology. And there will be no organizational affiliation in these great days - with the permission of Allah- which the Nation hopes for, the nation of which we are a part of, not guardians of.”¹⁷

Moreover, the outlook of Al-Qaeda is to appoint a ruler who is subject to a consultational council, i.e. not an absolute ruler.

And Shaykh Usama bin Ladin said about that:

¹⁵ The collected messages and directives of Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin, P.685

¹⁶ “Belief cuts down arrogance” by As-Sahab Foundation, August 2013

¹⁷ “Go to Jihad in Syria” As-Sahab Foundation, February 2016.

“The right in choosing a leader belongs to the Nation and it has a right to hold him to account if he deviates and the right to remove him if he does something which necessitates that.”¹⁸

And as for the future which Al-Qaeda hopes for itself: it is that it disappears and ceases to exist along with the rest of the Islamic group when an Islamic state is established.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF ANSWER BY TORE HAMMING

Initially, I should offer an excuse for referring to the wrong speech by al-Zawahiri in my question. Although Ahmed Al-Hamdan says Zawahiri did not make the call to unite in any of his speeches, he did indeed call for re-organization of Jihadists in Iraq in the third (and not fourth) speech of the ‘Brief Messages to a Victorious Ummah’ series. In the speech titled ‘Fear Allah in Iraq’ he said that Jihadists in Iraq should follow the example of Jabhat al-Nusra (Jabhat Fath ash-Shaam) in Syria and embed in the opposition.

Although not stating it directly, Al-Hamdan confirms the analysis most western analysts and academics subscribe to regarding Jabhat al-Nusra’s break with al Qaeda. Not officially being an Al-Qaeda affiliate would ensure Jabhat Fath ash-Sham more room to maneuver and facilitate easier access to funding and to unite with other groups. This is something al Qaeda is indeed very aware about and as Al Hamdan says ***“you are able to get people supporting Al-Qaeda without them knowing.”***

Perhaps not since its emergence, but at least during the previous decade, Al-Qaeda has followed a much more people-centric and staged process to the establishment of the caliphate than what we are currently witnessing with the Islamic State. Al-Qaeda considered the establishment of an Islamic state a long process, where the ambition was to exhaust the enemy to an extent that ensured the control of conquered territory could be kept despite opposition. Al Hamdan is also correct to point out that Al-Qaeda has paid more attention not to alienate other parties by exclusion. This is particularly evident in Syria and in Yemen.

Al Hamdan does, however, pay too much tribute to Al-Qaeda’s ‘moderate’ – in lack of a better word – approach. He uses a quotation from Zawahiri stating that they are not guardians of the Muslim nation, but that is exactly what Al-Qaeda strived to be initially as a Muslim vanguard movement and, I will argue, continues to consider themselves as. Compared to the Islamic State, surely Al-Qaeda has chosen a more moderate and pragmatic approach in the areas it is fighting. This is partly a result of them learning

¹⁸ The collected messages and directives of Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin, P.528

from experience and because its senior leaders always have stressed the importance of public support.

Although Al-Qaeda continuously stresses the staged process to the caliphate, they are not as against its emergence in the immediate future as Al-Hamdan says. In his 2007 speech with Al Sahab Media titled 'Review of Events', al-Zawahiri praised the Islamic State of Iraq in its efforts to unify the Jihadi groups in Iraq and setting up a state. He even says that ***“my brothers in the jihad movements in Iraq must realize that the signs of the Caliphate state have begun to loom on the horizon”***. After carefully assessing the contemporary public sentiments and analyzing the conflicts they are engaged in, al Qaeda has decided on a strategy of gradualism as the smartest way to proceed. This does not imply that Al-Qaeda will simply leave the future destiny of Syria, Iraq or Yemen in the hands of any candidate or group that has the support of the public if this actor is not sympathetic to Al-Qaeda's view of the world. The group has fought a strenuous struggle for more than 15 years and will not simply leave it to the people to decide.

As a follower of Jihadi movements, it is interesting to see how the description of Al-Qaeda in western media has changed substantially in the past five years. This is mainly a result of the emergence of an even more radical group, but also due to Al-Qaeda's strategic choices in this period. No matter the exact reason, this is exactly what Al-Qaeda wanted. As Al Hamdan said, Al-Qaeda will get people to support them without them even knowing.

Interviewer: One of the differences between IS and AQ is the generational divide; the veteran Jihadists in the camp of AQ and the younger generation being attracted by IS. Do you think this is still the case and, as IS is losing momentum, what do you think will happen to the younger generation of Sunni Jihadists – will they abandon Jihad, seek refuge in AQ or try and establish a new group?

Ahmed Al Hamdan: The answer to this question will be complex and overlapping. Yes, the majority of the youth are inclined towards the ISIS, and that is because the majority of the young people have a strong impulse and are drawn towards violence, and towards rushing for maximum revenge and killing and torture without carefully considering the benefits and harms which will come as a result of their actions. And these actions of theirs in many cases are not in accordance with the Shariah, rather they stem from that which satisfies them. Hence Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri warned Shaykh al Zarqawi about that and he said in his letter to him that ***"One of the most dangerous matters for the leaders is the enthusiasm of their supporters, especially the youth who are excited and burning to support the religion of Allah. So it is important that this enthusiasm is molded with wisdom"***.¹⁹

And Shaykh Usamah bin Ladin illustrated this point in a letter to Shaykh Abu Baseer al-Wuhayshi saying ***"The enthusiasm of the youth is a necessary element to win the battles. However, it should never be what determines the course of the war by making the leadership to run behind the enthusiasm of the youth. It is as the poet Al-Mutanabi has said: "Thoughtfulness comes before the courage of the brave - This (thoughtfulness) comes first and that second"***.²⁰

So according to Al-Qaeda, the matters are not measured by enthusiasm but rather by looking at what they result into.

It is not only myself who has noticed this matter that the youth mostly incline towards the one who speaks the harshest and the hardest. In fact, even Shaykh al-Maqdisi has said that ***"Many of the youth are lacking in education and upbringing due to them not sitting sufficiently in the gatherings of the scholars and due to their weakness in the knowledge of the manners of the Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and his noble companions and our righteous predecessors."***

¹⁹ Letter to Shaykh Abu Musab al Zarqawi, p. 14.

²⁰ Complete letters and directives of Shaykh Usama bin Ladin, p. 771.

Therefore, there has spread among them sicknesses and diseases and bad manners, and they incline towards extremism which is mostly caused by ignorance and due to their assumption that the best path is the harshest path.²¹

Previously the enthusiastic youth had no choice other than Al-Qaeda. And their policy which we have just stated previously, did not allow them to unleash themselves as they wish, and so they were forced to go along with that policy and suppress this excessive desire. However now there is another outlet for the youth to do whatever sadistic things they want and to unleash themselves without thinking about any outcomes or consequences or without looking into the benefits or harm resulting from these actions. And hence many of the enthusiastic youth found their long desired objectives getting fulfilled in this group ISIS.

Secondly, many of the youth are new to the Jihadi experience and this is different from that of the elders who have lived through the previous Jihadi experiences and have seen the reasons for its failure and have seen that those same reasons are being repeated by the Islamic State. For example, antagonizing everyone and opening battle fronts with everyone and preferring to fight the Islamic groups more than fighting the enemies that are agreed upon by all, and extremism and breaking away from the Ummah, and other such things which have made them stay away from supporting this state so that it does not lead to them falling into those same mistakes again. The Prophet, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has said ***“The believer is not stung from the same hole twice”***²², and this is contrary to this new generation who did not know anything about Jihad except from an audio speech or a video clip, and who did not live through the real experience in the field from which one can learn how to distinguish between the right and the wrong.

Another matter which causes ISIS to attract more youth than Al-Qaeda, is the hugeness of their media campaign which is directed specifically towards the youth and their continuous communication with these youth, and we mean here the non-Arabic speakers. For example, ISIS is keen to translate its publications and spread the statements made by the people of a specific country (such as England) and for directing their message to the youth in their country urging them to come (to them). Also the main official magazine of this group is published in English and they have opened a channel, Al-Amaq News, which is also in the English language.

This group ISIS is very eager to make sure it attracts the youth. Perhaps they intensified their propaganda in English because it is a universal language understood by many nationalities. So they hit many birds with one stone. In contrast, there is a very huge shortage from the side of Al-Qaeda in focusing on the call towards the youth to join

²¹ Answering the questioner on matters of new issues (1/16).

²² *“The believer is not stung from the same hole twice”* Saheeh Muslim: 2998, Saheeh al Bukhari :6133.

them, and it has not translated its recent releases, and there would be no continuous and direct contact with them in the English language. And its magazines which are released in the English language are not regular, meaning two months may pass without an issue getting released. And this is what causes many of the youth to interact with those who are addressing them and who try to make events revolve around these youths.

On top of that which we have previously stated, the delay by Al-Qaeda in responding (to the allegations of ISIS against it), by them hoping that the situation could be rectified through reconciliation, has led many of the youth into joining the ranks of the Islamic State. Then these people gradually went further to the point of being a partisan to their group at an early stage. Then they began to call their friends or those who have just been released from prisons to support or join the Islamic State. I myself, for example, when I was released from prison and I saw that most of my friends are supporting ISIS, then I would mostly end up supporting them, and I would give priority to their statements for judging the events and matters in which there were disagreements in Shaam (Syria).

And another thing is that if ISIS loses momentum, then the existence of its old propaganda materials can still be effective for recruitment in the long term. For example, Shaykh Anwar al Awlaki was killed in the year 2012 and his words still recruit and inspire the people despite the Shaykh having departed 4 years ago.

So the only solution for Al-Qaeda is to use the existing cadres they have to match the efforts of ISIS in their media propaganda. Otherwise ISIS will be the only choice for one who wants to join the Jihad.

But there is another matter which may help Al-Qaeda without them having to engage in daily media wars with ISIS. That is that a lot of Arabs and non-Arabs who joined ISIS after watching the videos released by ISIS which portrayed itself as the perfect ideal, when they entered it, they were shocked by the security controls. These security controls emerged at a later time after the Islamic state gained control over Raqqa and Sharqiyya, and after al-Adnani announced that whoever wanted to split the ranks would have their heads split. So that resulted in a fear of leaving ISIS and the dissidents then participating in recording personal experiences in which they state the mistakes and the negative aspects of ISIS and then this becoming a strong obstacle in their recruitment and propaganda. So ISIS has taken preemptive steps amongst which is that it has restricted the role of many of the well-known people who pledged allegiance to it, such as Bin'ali, Dr. Sa'd al Hunaiti and Mahdi Zaydaan and others who had a heavy presence in the media, due to their fear that they may defect later on. And so the appearance of these personalities in the media almost became non-existent under ISIS. Their second step would be to bring forward the one who expresses doubt. And the existence of this doubt would lead to a preemptive attempt to find out which person may possibly defect so that they may deal with him early. And due to this doubt some actions of the

members would sometimes be misinterpreted, and thus there would be abuse and exaggerations by wrongly interpreting some actions of the members in a way in which they were not intended. For example, one of the soldiers asked for a biography of Al Adnani and Baghdadi as they were the leaders of his state and he wanted to know more about them, and so he was accused of being a spy. This mania in their dealings has made many of the soldiers annoyed, especially since their loyalty comes under doubt. For this reason, many have started wanting to leave because they find themselves living under a dictatorial regime. This is with regards to the youth. As for the young women, the matter which has made some of them to strive to leave is that they have been forcefully married. The young women who migrate to the land of the Khilafa without a guardian, she will not be left like this, rather she will be made to marry, and even if she is already married previously then she will be separated from her husband and made to marry again. Likewise, the woman who migrates with her husband, if he gets killed, then she will be made to marry with or without her consent. And this has happened on many occasions with the women. And now I will leave the issue to the previous Amir of Jabhat al-Nusrah in Albukamal to tell us some of what he has witnessed from the stories of those who have defected:

One of them sent to me an [audio recording](#) of the leader of the Muhajireen in Jabhat Fath al Sham 'Abu Hajar At-Tunisi' in which he said these words: *"I will narrate to you some of the stories of some of the women and men who have fled to me. Some of them are funny and some will make one cry, there are various types, and the stories are many. I will narrate one such story to you."*

Two British women came to me, one of them is now in the custody of Jabhat. They had fled. They narrated to me that there was a large house there where they put the widowed women and those women who had fled from their parents after they had convinced them that their parents were Kuffar who are living in western countries and in the apostate states. So these women came and they put them in this house and they said to them "It is compulsory for you to marry. Not a single one would remain without being married, whether a widow or one who has come newly".

And they said: "The house was very narrow. Some apartments were above others and there was difficulty in living, eating, drinking and using bathrooms because for every hundred women there were only two bathrooms".

They said that there was an Iraqi woman with them who spoke English well, that is she was an Iraqi woman who was like Al Anbari in criminality and rudeness, and she would behave badly towards the women. She would bring men who would mostly be Iraqi leaders and she would choose the most beautiful of them and her face would be uncovered forcibly in front of them. And if he wanted to marry her she would be married to him. Marriage was mostly forced; otherwise they would have to sit in the house in

difficulty until the woman would think to herself and say "I will get married... It is okay."
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And these two women who fled did so about a year and a half ago when the situation was a little easier. They made an agreement with a Taxi driver and gave him money and he got them out. He moved them from place to place under the pretense that they were his wives. They arrived at a place and then I went and received them and brought them to my house. With me were my wife and her mother and sisters. It was extremely cold and they were shivering. They asked me about someone they knew who was married to a British sister whom they knew previously. And they also knew him. He used to live in Britain. I put them in my house with my wife, gave them food and drink and then took them to that brother.

They sat with the brother for some days and then they made Takfeer on him. And after they left, the brother told me "they made Takfeer on you also". Of course, they were saying that ISIS is oppressive and criminal, and we thought that they had repented. However, it became clear that they were Takfeeris and the brother said to me "they say you are a Kaafir! ."

So I said "why did they say I am a Kaafir? What did I do?"

And he said to me "they said that you support the Zionists"

I said "How do I support the Zionists? Do I have a weapons factory?"

He said to me "No, it is because you bought "Pepsi" and one of them said "he is an apostate, him and his wife because they made us drink Pepsi" and the other said "only he is an apostate because he is the one who brought us Pepsi".

As for the youth whom I took them out, one of them was imprisoned by Ahrar. And when the leader in Ahrar "Muhammad Najeeb" asked him, "What is your opinion about ISIS?", he said "apostates". So he started laughing and asked "how are they apostates?"

²³ A long time ago I asked Shaykh al Maqdisi about women travelling to the Khilafa state after one of them asked me about this. And I wrote an article about that which is translated into English, and he sent this [audio recording](#) in which he says: "This is one of the calamities which we have advised them about, and they disregarded our advice. They have even taken their passports from them, and the widows from amongst them are married off by the will of the judge whenever their husbands are killed. They cram the women along with their children in crowded and neglected places like stables of animals, in large groups. One of them comes and proposes marriage to them and they accept it just to get out of this overcrowded and neglected place. The situation is very miserable. Many of them are regretful and wish that they were able to flee. Despite all that, there are still those who are naïve and leave their countries and go there. We have heard several misfortunes."

I have sought permission from Shaykh al Maqdisi before spreading this recording as well as the answer, and he agreed to it, and modified and added to the text. Both these recordings are exclusive and have not been published before.

I had gone to take him out by virtue of having known him in Tunisia and I knew that he was a very simple and naive person. So I brought him out. And I once asked him "Do you consider Baghdadi as a Kaafir?" He said "yes I consider him to be a Kaafir". So I said "why do you consider him to be a Kaafir?" He said "He is from the 5 heads of the Tawaghit who call the people to worship them."

So you would feel..., glory be to Allah..., that they are strange people. You would find him making Takfeer on all the people and having lost faith in all the people. And the first ones who they make Takfeer upon are ISIS...! And they believe that the most evil people on the face of the earth, even more evil than Israel are ISIS...!

Naturally more than 90% of them believe all the factions to be apostates and Kaafirs even though they act towards them with goodness and even though the Free Syrian Army who helped them to get out were good towards them.

Once I helped one of them to get out along with his family and he used to cry. And after he left the areas under ISIS, he remained for a period of three months in Azaz, meaning he remained 5 months in total before leaving. And one of the brothers told me that when he reached Turkey he said "There is a lot of good in Abu Hajr and many things, but he is still an apostate because he remains with Jabhat". Glory be to God! Strange minds! I say that if the door is opened for them, not one of them would remain (in ISIS). There are now a very large number of defectors with Faylaq and with FSA, and only Allah knows how many. Hundreds, possibly thousands have left them, and if the door is opened not one would remain with them.

There even is a very large number of men and women who have spoken to me and who want to get out, and as it is known, whoever wants to leave and is caught, then the judgment upon him according to them is either prison or death, as they consider it as incitement against the Islamic state.

Their prisons are full and they have a large number of prisoners, the majority of whom are Muhajireen. There was a man there called Abu Harith at Tunisi who knew me and his friends left before him, and I sent him my number. But then when he wanted to leave, they caught him. And I later received the news that they killed him. One time two youth from Tunisia left them and one of them stayed with one of the youth for five days, and he stayed those five days without praying because his commitment in religion was only recent. And they were in Idlib smoking and would have a cup of coffee in their hands and be playing billiards as if they were hanging around in the capital of Tunisia. Then they went to Turkey and I heard that one of them went to Europe and he has a girlfriend who was an ISIS supporter, who also fled from there, and he went to be with her in Sweden.

Of course those of them who are not polluted with the perverted Takfeeri mentality are very few. One of them was a businessman from Tunisia who was not too old. He was

24 or 25 years of age. And he did not become polluted much by Takfeeri mentality. But on the other hand the majority of those who leave believe that ISIS are apostates, and some of them even make Takfeer on the one who does not make Takfeer on ISIS.

They have a very strange hopelessness and they no longer believe that there is Jihad.

There are a number of them who have gone to Sudan and a number of them went to Europe. And there are those who surrendered themselves and there is a very large number of them in Turkey. Naturally they make Takfeer on all the people and they say that as all the people are Kuffar, then it is better to remain with the Kuffar in Turkey than with the Kuffar in Syria or to go to another country."

We come to know from the testimony of the brother that many of them abandoned Jihad for various reasons, whether that was due to increasing extremism which made all the groups disbelievers in his opinion (i.e. disbelievers fighting against disbelievers), 'so why should I fight?!' Or due to his reaction when he saw the opposite of his idealized dreams which this defector had hoped for, that this would be the desired Islamic state under which we would lead a life of ease and comfort. But what he saw disappointed him and so his convictions got shattered and he lost hope and got frustrated and wanted to abandon everything and return back to where he was originally. And this has happened before, even with one of the greatest leaders of Al-Qaeda, and that is Shaykh Athiyatullah al-Libbi, if Allah had not kept him firm with the brothers who were with him. He said after he took part in the Algerian experience how the extremists in Algeria contributed to the corruption of the Jihad until it deteriorated and became weak. He said ***"I personally went through a difficult experience in Algeria and came through surviving by my skin, and I thought that there will be no Jihad in the foreseeable future in my life, and I was almost in despair and I was afflicted by sadness, worry, gloom and despondency and similar things which are difficult to describe... It was only that Allah had protected me by giving me some firmness and benefited me through the company of the brothers, and by being consoled with the people of previous experience and goodness."***²⁴.

And both of these are harmful to the Islamic State - if they returned back to their countries and gave their testimonies about what they went through, and if they spoke about the huge difference between the media and the reality. And this is especially so if the one who returns back or the one who defects is someone who is obeyed and has followers. This will cause many to re-examine themselves and change their path.

ISIS fears that Al-Qaeda will be an alternative, and so it took another preemptive step, that is they considered it a priority to speak about it and attack it and to try to distort it. If you see the magazine 'Dabiq' which belongs to ISIS, you would feel that Al-Qaeda is

²⁴ Answers to the Hisbah forum, p. 14.

targeted more than the Americans, the Rafidhah (Shi'a) and the Nusayris by the media propaganda of this group. So when you become filled with this propaganda whether it is based on truth or falsehood, then even if you split from ISIS, you will not join Al-Qaeda. And this is the practical application of the theory of the propaganda of lies as spoken about by Shaykh Abu Qatada in his audio series on globalization. He says, ***“A certain party will tell lies to their supporters and will continue lying to them until they reach the point where these lies take the place of certainty, and even if the truth is revealed to them after having reached this stage, then it will have no effect upon them as they have lived with the lie until they have reached the point of no return. This principle can be summed up in the saying of the Nazi minister of propaganda, Joseph Gobbels “Lie and continue to lie until the people believe you”.***

So we have 3 options:

1. Join Al Qaeda and resume the stage of Jihad
2. Abandon Jihad altogether and all that is related to it, and return to the stage that was prior to migration and prior to practicing the religion (And this is if the governments accept this, because sometimes you may want to make such a step but because you participated in Jihad, the governments will mostly throw you in prison when you return back to your country. And rather than live a new life your association with the Jihadi prisoners in prison will compel you to continue on the same path rather than give up.)
3. The formation of a new entity, independent of Al Qaeda which will attract all those who have lost faith in Al Qaeda and ISIS alike.

As for which will be the most chosen option, it is difficult to judge that for now.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF ANSWER BY TORE HAMMING

I will add in with a brief comment to the topic of the generational divide.

Joining the ‘hottest’ Jihadi outlet of the time has always been the choice of the youth. We know from the Sinjar records that in the time of Al-Qaida in Iraq, the average age of people joining was between 24 and 25. From internal Islamic State documents, processed in the CTC’s [‘The Caliphate’s Global Workforce’](#) we see an almost similar average age of people joining the Islamic State, with recruits being between 26 and 27.

The Islamic State has thus become the standard choice of the youth wanting to join a Jihadi project. It has provided the youth an outlet where they can channel their frustrations violently and especially their media machine has been of essential

importance to attract people. The hope of Al-Qaida is that although the Islamic State propaganda machine has been efficient in attracting people, then the experience of having witnessed the state from the inside will cause them to leave. However, the big question is then where will they go? Will they join Al-Qaida, leave Jihad altogether or will a new movement see the light as the Islamic State is losing momentum?

At the moment, it is still too early to come up with an answer to the question. Al-Qaida will, of course, do its best to attract people who become disillusioned with the Islamic State project – both al-Zawahiri and al-Maqdisi have kept the door open for people to join Al-Qaida. The Al-Qaida leadership has been criticized for its 'long and boring' lectures, which were in contrast to the more aggressive rhetoric of Islamic State leaders. However, Al-Qaida is currently experiencing renewed popularity. Al-Zawahiri is on a charm offensive in his recent video statements and a younger generation of Al-Qaida sympathetic ideologues like Abdallah al-Muhaysini is helping to increase the cool-factor of the movement in the eyes of the younger generation.

A whole generation is currently growing up with violence as a normality. Some of them will eventually continue of the road of Jihad, but that they necessarily choose either the Islamic State or Al-Qaida is not a certainty.

4

THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGUES

Interviewer: Part of the struggle between IS and AQ happens through ideologues either part of or sympathetic to one of the two movements. AQ has consistently been supported by major ideologues like Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada al-Filastini and Hani Siba'i, while IS has relied on younger people, most famously Turki al-Bin'ali. How do you see the role of these ideologues for the broader struggle within Salafi-Jihadism?

Ahmed Al Hamdan: In fact, this question has been phrased wrongly. We must realize that the problems of ISIS are no longer confined to a conflict with Al-Qaeda in just the Arab region only making the Arabs to be the only influential speakers for Jihad. Rather ISIS has come to every language and nationalities. And they have come into conflict with groups that are not Arabs. These nationalities and groups have speakers that speak in their languages and influence them more than the Arab speakers. I will give you an example:

Amongst the English speakers, Shaykh Anwar al Awlaki is considered to be one of the main leaders and ideologues of Jihad, while amongst the Arabic speakers he is considered to be a Jihadi commander only. Why? It is because all the Shariah treatises of Shaykh Anwar have been released in the English language. They were not released in the Arabic language with the exception of 4 statements, which were all exhortative statements.

So if we compare for example the influence of Shaykh Anwar al Awlaki amongst the English speakers with that of the influence of the Shaykhs such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filastini, there is no doubt that Shaykh Anwar al Awlaki would be much more influential. And this can also be seen with the American Shaykh Ahmad Jibril. I myself and some of those occupied with the Arab Jihadi issues had never heard of him at all until recently when communicating with the English Jihadi media. And we came to know that this person has a lot of influence and is widely known, despite us having not heard about him at all before.

And this is a general principle: The more material exists for a person in a specific language, the more will be his influence upon the speakers of that language. How many materials of the ideologues of Jihadi groups in Arabic have been translated into

Turkistani language for example? Maybe 2 or 3. So is this sufficient to influence the Turkistanis in the battle against ISIS? The answer is no. However, when a person like Mufti Abu Dhar Azzam break away and release a statement criticizing ISIS, this will have a greater effect than translating some articles of al-Maqdisi and al-Filistini about ISIS into the Turkestan language, even if he is less knowledgeable than them. Why is this so? Because Abu Dhar is known amongst the Turkistanis and he speaks in their language and he has held lectures and lessons among them. And so, being previously known as well as a common language is what becomes effective for having influence in battles, and not just Shariah knowledge.

Who is the foremost ideologue for Jihad and the Jihadi groups in Europe? We don't know. Perhaps a Shaykh who is young in age and who speaks French will have a greater influence than Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi or Abu Qatada al-Filistini upon the Jihadis who speak in French.

So the person who speaks directly to you and who always keeps you at the center of the events will be more effective than a person with Islamic knowledge who does not speak directly to you and who has to use interpreters who may be late in translating his statements or may not translate all of his statements.

However, because of the worldwide battle against ISIS, there have emerged communication bridges between groups that are fighting against ISIS and who speak different languages. For example, we see that Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri's words get translated into Russian by the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus²⁵ or get translated into Turkistani by the Turkistan Islamic Party,²⁶ and we have seen Shaykh Ayman trying to address these organizations by mentioning their merits. And we have seen how the ideologues and the leaders of the Arab groups have released statements in solidarity with the Islamic Emirate of Caucasus against the attempts of ISIS to split its ranks,²⁷ and we have seen how when the Turkistan Islamic Party released a speech from its top most leader refuting ISIS, they put the Arab scholars of Jihad in the background.²⁸

So I think we are facing a situation known as 'the globalization of the Jihadi organizations' in contrast to 'the globalization of ISIS'.

And this has resulted in intermingling and openness towards each other due to the existence of a common enemy. Previously the Russians were fighting the Caucasians

²⁵ It is the speech entitled "The scholar with action" which is part of the series "Carry the weapon of the martyr". It has been translated by the media committee of the State of Dagestan VD.

²⁶ It is the speech "Turkistan- Patience and then victory" from the series (The Islamic Spring). It has been translated by "Sawt ul Islam" which is the media wing of the Turkistan Islamic Party.

²⁷ The joint statement '*A statement about the recent events in the Causasus*' issued on 28 January 2015, which had the participation of a group of Shaykhs the most notable being Shaykh Ibrahim Rubaish, Shaykh Harith al Nadhari, Shaykh Khalid Batarfi, Dr. Sami al Uraidi, Abu Maria al Qahtani and Dr. Abdullah al Muhaysini.

²⁸ A special interview by Sawt ul-Islam with the leader of the Turkistan Party, Shaykh Abdul Haq, in February 2016

and the Chinese were fighting the Turkistanis and the Americans were fighting Al Qaeda, most of whom have been Arabs. However, these organizations have now found themselves against a united common enemy, which is ISIS, which is trying to dismantle them. And this has led to them eventually coordinating with each other to fight this new enemy which is threatening the fortresses from within, as opposed to the enemy which is not common to them all and threatens the fortresses from the outside.

And this is another principle: Whenever there is a single enemy, there is a larger chance of unity and cooperation.

So due to this, there began to circulate writings which refute ISIS and translated works have begun to spread in different languages about a single issue only, that is refuting the misconceptions caused by ISIS. And I think this is something that has not happened before.

This is one matter. As for the other matter, it is why have younger ideologues inclined towards ISIS, while their teachers have inclined towards Al-Qaeda?

I have answered this question in my previous reply, and I have said that the greater a person's age and the more his experience in life, the greater will be his caution in dealing with any newly occurring matter, as opposed to the one who has no experience and whom you mostly see acting without forethought and who is more emotional rather than being logical.

Secondly, these students took the lead at a time when those Shaykhs were imprisoned- I mean the two Shaykhs Abu Muhammad al-Maqqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filistini. And I think they said to themselves that "*we must fill the vacuum left by our Shaykhs*", and they put themselves on the same level of their Shaykhs, and they began to speak on fresh matters which are very complicated, in a manner which is different from that of their Shaykhs who used to be calm and careful. And here let me write a historical testimony:

Turki Bin'ali had gone to Syria twice. The first time, he claimed, he wanted to send relief aid, and the second time was the one in which he did not return. And before he went for his first time, he was told not to listen to only one side, specifically in the matter of the dispute between Jabhat un-Nusrah and ISIS. But when he returned from Syria, we sat down together, and there was a change in his tone of speech about Jabahat al-Nusra and it had become very harsh²⁹. And when he was asked and told "***Have you tried to***

²⁹ As a fact, the tone of Turki Bin'ali regarding al Nusra was different in the past. I had written a response to one of the opponents, but before publishing it, I sent it to Turki Bin'ali in his Facebook account, on 20 October 2013. So he replied to me privately and said "May Allah bless you. These are beautiful points, but do not cause differences between JN and ISIS, for we are with JN against the Tawaghit and their lackeys, but we condemn their mistake in leaving ISIS". But when he returned back from Syria, his stance became different and he no longer even agreed to spread the videos showing the operations carried out by Al Nusrah against the Tawaghit and their stooges. And he

hear from Jabhat un-Nusra when you were in Syria to understand their point of view?” he said “No, rather the Islamic State and its representatives are trustworthy and they do not lie!” And so there is no need to hear both sides...!

This is not something which someone else has told me, rather I saw it with my own eyes and heard it with my own ears. So all his books and speeches and articles with which he supported ISIS were built upon this foundation, which is hearing only from one side which as per his claim, does not lie. Then it became clear to us with the passage of time that these representatives would lie even in their official publications. So look at what happens when a student takes the place of a teacher while he is not qualified!!

On the other hand, Shaykh Abu Qatada was asked after 20 years, did he benefit from the events in Algeria when he was young. And he said **“Yes, I have benefitted greatly, one of the most important of which was to not be deceived by the way how a questioner formulates his question, because sometimes he will lie and deceive and formulate questions which are not in accordance with reality in order to get the Fatwa he wants to support his stance against his opponents. So whenever I feel that a person is doing this, I would ignore his questions so that he does not take my Fatwas to misuse them in an improper manner”**³⁰.

But the person with little experience will fall into this mistake and he will sympathize with the questioner who has formulated his question that shows him as being oppressed, and he will issue a Fatwa according to what he likes and desires.

What makes a person forget himself or forget his real position is those around him, especially when they praise and exaggerate in praising the student of knowledge, and when he is addressed as ‘Shaykh’ and ‘scholar’ and with other such names. And when many people repeat these words it causes him to actually think that he has become a Shaykh and a scholar and that he is entitled to speak on the most complex matters. Therefore, he should not be misled by such words of praise, and they must not cause him to forget his actual position. And if he knew what his actual position is, he will not be affected by such praises and speak on critical issues while not being qualified for it,

would compel you to take your stance and choose to support ISIS and be hostile to everyone who oppose them, the first and foremost being Jabhat al Nusra.

³⁰ Shaykh Abu Qatada said in his third audio meeting in Al Fajr room on Paltalk on 22 April 2015: *“We benefitted a lot from the experience in Algeria, and the greatest of them was in the problem of lying and using different technical words. For example, if a Sunni man from one of the Jihadi groups in one of the countries send you a message saying “Oh Shaykh, an innovator has appeared amongst us and we have found with him documents indicating that he will contact the regime to reconcile with them, and we have found with him documents showing that he is planning a coup to overthrow the leadership in order to reconcile with the regime and deviate the Jihad into such and such path etc.”, and you think that he is a Sunni. So what answer will you give him if you are a student of knowledge? The answer would be: He is causing corruption in the land, and the least you can do is stop him, and if you cannot end his innovation without killing him, then kill him. This is what the scholars say. But we would discover later on that the innovation was not like how the questioner had mentioned but it was something else. So is the mistake in your Fatwa, or is the mistake and the lie from the questioner? And because of that, the questions asked by some brothers would remain with me pending for months and I would not reply to them. They are trustworthy brothers but they narrate the incidents as they like and as they see.*

because he knows his true worth, and he will not be carried away by these people who praise him as he knows that they are exaggerating or maybe they are exaggerating for other purposes, such as to cause you to fall into this trap, and hence you would be careful. But the one with little experience is often naïve and not cautious or aware.

In the end, how is it possible for the gap between the generations to have an effect in supporting different organizations? There is no doubt that the influence of the teachers is much greater, and the level of their fame and their positions are greater than these students who emerged only through the internet. Shaykh al-Maqdisi is a person who is well-known to the most prominent leaders and to all the chiefs of the Jihadi movement, and likewise Shaykh Abu Qatada. They are considered by many as sources of reference on religious matters for Al Qaeda,³¹ as opposed to these students who are not famous, because many of the students used to write under pseudonyms and some of them did not reveal who they are even to this day. So some are hesitant in promoting or mentioning people who are unknown, and many of them have stopped writing after joining ISIS.

And this is because of two issues. First, they are busy in teaching and education because ISIS has seized large areas in Iraq and Syria and it needs to fill this vacuum by teachers of Sharia, who hold seminars, speeches and lessons. And the one who becomes busy with that will find it difficult to write replies and research on the internet. The second issue is that which Shaykh Al-Maqdisi himself informed me, from his contact with people in ISIS which was that the minister of information who was recently killed had prevented these people from writing under their real names, fearing that they would achieve high status and then split later, which could be used as propaganda to dissuade people from joining ISIS. Apart from that there is no doubt that the teachers are the ones with more influence and credibility than the students and they are ahead of them for the following reasons:

1. Because their knowledge on religion and awareness on Islamic and religious matters is more than the students.
2. Because they are well known and are people who had their stances and sacrifices and firmness that are known for over three decades, unlike many of the students who write under pseudonyms and who only jumped towards the forefront in few years and who are actually unknown, except to a small group of people, and their stances, sacrifices and firmness are unknown. And because of

³¹ Shaykh Ayman Al Zawahiri in his book *'The Exoneration'* has considered Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi as a reference point for Al Qaeda (p.44) as well as Shaykh Abu Qatada (p.47). And Turki bin Ali wrote a book entitled *'Al Qawl An-Narjisi Bi Adaalat Sheikhina Al Maqdisi'* (a book containing collections of statements from different scholars who spoke about the virtue of Sheikh Maqdisi and praised him) and another book *'Al Qilaada Fee Tazkiyath Sheikhina Abu Qatada'* and in these two books Bin'ali gathered a collection of testimonies of Jihadi leaders from all the fronts of Jihad regarding these two Shaykhs. The students of these Shaykhs did not gain even a small fraction of the trust that the leaders of Mujahideen have in these Shaykhs.

previous security issues there was a fear of promoting people who are unknown.³² Thus many of these people have been ignored. As for those from the students who are known, they are not widely known amongst the Mujahideen and their sacrifices are nothing in front of those of their teachers who suffered trials and tribulations.

3. Another issue is that the style of the Shaykhs when they respond would remain within the confines of scientific method, as opposed to the response of their students to their teachers. They would respond to their teachers by transgressing the boundaries of scientific method and go in a method which contains insults, rudeness and by using words of filth, derision and mockery, which would make them in a weaker position in the sight of the neutral observer.

ISIS knows that the teachers have a greater influence than their students. Because of that, even if some of the students join them, they would still not be content with that, rather they would be determined to discredit the Shaykhs by tarnishing their image. For example, the publication which was released under the title 'Smashing the idol of Al-Maqdisi' after Shaykh al-Maqdisi became a mediator between them and the Jordanian government in the matter of the Jordanian pilot, Muadh al Kasasbah, they deliberately tried to confuse between 'mediation' and 'representation', and they portrayed him as a representative of the government which he makes Takfeer upon. And hence because he has become their 'representative' then he has deviated from his path in the matter of disassociating from these governments. This is despite the fact that in the same recording, there are words which confirm that he is not a representative, such as him describing the Jordanian pilot as an apostate.

Another matter is that they have gone beyond the stage of confusing and reached the stage of lying. They stated in one of their magazines, that Shaykh Abu Qatada has alliance to the Tawaghit³³. This is despite the fact that just one week before the release

³² Leadership status in the Jihadi organizations should only be given to a person who has undergone hardships and trials and has remained firm. Shaykh Usama Bin Ladin says while putting down the condition to qualify for leadership that "*It is necessary that the top level leadership be from those who have been tested and examined thoroughly.*" [First set of Abbottabad Documents, Index number- SOCOM-2012-0000016] And one of the types of this test is to go to battles and fight, because the spy often sells his principles in exchange for money in order to live, but in the battles there is a very big possibility for him to get killed and so his true nature will be seen. Shaykh Usama bin Ladin says: "*For example, here we feel reassured when people go to the front lines and get tested there*" [First set of Abbottabad Documents, Index number: SOCOM-2012-0000003]. And from previous experience, the Jihadi groups learnt about the problem of the leadership being taken over by people who are unknown or who did not have any previous experience in the field of trials. Muhammad Suroor Zayn al Abideen (the one to whom the Suroori movement has been ascribed to, which is a Salafi school of thought) who had associated with some people who were involved in the Syrian Jihadi during the Eighties, had mentioned the incident of the infiltration into the leadership by a person named as Abu Abdullah al Jasari who used to read the Quran a lot and offer prayers at night and wake the youth for prayer, and just because of these actions he was made part of the leadership even though he was unknown and no one from the Islamic groups knew him. Then he took part in the arrest of Adnan Al Uqla and the top leadership and in aborting the armed struggle. (Refer to his book: How to protect the Islamic ranks from the hypocrites, p.77) Shaykh Abu Mus'ab al Suri has confirmed this information in his book '*The Jihadi Islamic revolution in Syria - Experiences and Lessons*' (p.150)

³³ The '*Rumiyah*' magazine, first issue, page 29-30, September 2016

of the magazine, Shaykh Abu Qatada wrote in a tweet ***“The Muslims have not stopped falling into the same mistakes which they made before, the crime of allying with the Tawaghit”***³⁴.

But why does ISIS strive so hard to do this? It is because they know that the students are not enough and that it is the teachers who have a greater influence.

ISIS is trying to neutralize the influence of these Shaykhs, and when they will no longer have influence, then their students will at once take a superior position. Shaykh Abu Ahmad al Jazaairi, who is a Shariah leader of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib, has spoken the truth when he said: ***“Bringing down the symbolic personalities means necessarily the rising of the inferior ones. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said “When there doesn’t remain any scholar then the people will take the ignorant ones as their leaders and they will be asked, and they will give Fatwas without knowledge, thus becoming misguided and misguiding the others”***³⁵.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF ANSWER BY TORE HAMMING

In terms of ideologues, the struggle between Al-Qaida and the Islamic State could be framed as a struggle between teachers and their students. Have the teachers been rendered irrelevant by the fierce rhetoric or do they continue to influence Jihadi followers in great numbers? Or are new elements, like language, implying that new ideologues are shining in the increasing globalized Jihadi environment?

It is actually all about the language. Or almost. That could easily be the initial conclusion of Al Hamdan in his assessment of the influence of contemporary Jihadi-Salafi ideologues. The prominence of an ideologue is not necessarily dependent on his knowledge, or cultural capital, but to a great extent on his way of connecting with listeners. It is interesting to hear from a keen Jihadi follower like Al Hamdan that Ahmad Jibril was unknown to him until recently although he is a household name in many Jihadi circles in the West.

The above statement about the importance of language is only true to some extent. Despite the fact that most of their statement are in Arabic, the Jordanian ‘teachers’ of Abu Qatada and al-Maqdisi, who have been extensively studied in several articles on ‘Jihadica’, continue to be dominant voices among individuals sympathetic to the Jihadi project all over the world.

³⁴ His personal twitter account is “@sheikhabuqatadh” on 25 August 2016. [Link here](#)

³⁵ His personal twitter account is “@ahmed_karim25” on 15 May 2016. [Link here](#)

In a discussion I had with the London-based Abu Mahmoud al-Filistini about the importance of ideologues in the fitna between Al-Qaida and the Islamic State, he told me that ideologues are by far the most actors in influencing people. ***“Even more than any military commander”***, Abu Mahmoud said. This is also why it is so interesting to follow how these ideologues intervene in the fitna, who they side with and how they manage to influence ‘the masses’. As a result, it is not surprising that Jihadi groups and media organizations put a lot of effort into translating speeches, statements, videos etc. Almost every time I check my ‘Telegram’, there is an update on a new language added to the repertoire of a channel.

The competitive nature of the Al-Qaida - Islamic State relationship is affecting the logic of the entire Jihadi field. Lately, this has been very evident in the case of Jund al-Aqsa. This competitive environment and the flexible position of many groups is not only considered a risk from an Al-Qaida or an Islamic State perspective, but also as a potential. This is a central issue for Jihadi ideologues and the media supporting them as they seek to warn people against the opposing group, while promoting their own camp. In the case of Maqdisi, Abu Qatada, and Hani Siba’i they all have 50,000+ followers on Twitter and their statements are discussed intensively and listened to. This mobilizing power continues to be important for al-Qaida and is something the Islamic State is envying.

Initially, the students proved capable substitutes of the teachers, but as time is passing it is my impression that the latter is slowly regaining their importance in the eyes of Jihadis around the world.

THE INCREASING EXTREMISM WITHIN THE ISLAMIC STATE

Interviewer: A recent interesting development is the dismissal of Turki al-Binali from the IS Sharia Council allegedly due to his 'moderate' view on the 'excuse of ignorance' and Takfir al-Adhir. This could be interpreted as a defeat of the Bin'ali trend within IS and a victory for the so-called Hazimis (followers of Ahmed al-Hazimi). How do you interpret this development?

Ahmed Al Hamdan: Extremism in Takfeer is the filthy germ which is found in every Jihadi group because of ignorance and impulsiveness and due to feeling oppressed and other such reasons. However, each group deals with this disease in different ways. There are those who take a gradual approach in dealing with it in which those who have extremism are made to undergo Shariah courses like what happened with a group of youth in Waziristan. The officials of Al-Qaeda put them under a Shariah course to correct their thinking³⁶. Or it would be by expulsion from the group like what happened when Shaykh Abu Mus'ab az-Zarqawi expelled a coordinator who made it a condition that a person should make Takfeer on the Saudi scholars like Bin Baz and Ibn

³⁶ In fact Shaykh Usama Bin Ladin used to prohibit speaking about making Takfeer on the common soldiers. He said, *"In an authentic Hadeeth from our Prophet, may prayers and peace be upon him, he said "If a person makes Takfeer on his brother, then one of them would definitely become a Kaafir". If the one who has been called a Kaafir is indeed a Kaafir then it is over, and he is a Kaafir. But if he was not a Kaafir then it returns to the one who said it (on the one who made Takfeer). So this is a very, very, very severe warning against getting involved in this issue, especially in regards to Takfeer on a specific individual. So fear Allah, glory be to Him, and beware, and again beware...! Making Takfeer on the people is a very great sin, and from amongst the very major sins. So safeguard your tongues. And when we speak, if the speaker is from the people of knowledge and knows the rules of Takfeer, there is no problem if he speaks about this and clarifies it to his brothers, like when sometimes some people commit nullifiers of Islam. So it is detailed and sensitive issue. Sometimes a person may do an act of Kufr but he will still not be a Kaafir due to his ignorance or due to some compulsion. These are detailed issues and it is not easy for the brothers in general to learn it or specialize in it. But we normally speak on matters in general. So fear Allah and stay away from this matter, and busy yourselves by remembering Allah a lot and supplicating to Him and by acknowledging the blessings of Allah and being grateful for these blessings, until we meet Allah while He is pleased with us. So before you speak, think about what will be the consequences of this statement, and strive hard in obeying Allah and in Jihad for the sake of Allah. And fear Allah in those matters in which you do not have a deep knowledge. And to fear Allah means you should not boldly issue Fatwas. [Faith defeats arrogance' at 58:00 minutes, by As Sahaab Media foundation]*

The former Mujahid in Afghanistan and the ex-detainee in Guantanamo, Waleed Muhammad Al Haajj, said on his Twitter page: *"The commander Shaykh Usama Bin Ladin, may Allah have mercy upon him, gathered all the Mujahideen at the Farooq military camp leaving only the guards at the gate when he had heard that some of the Mujahideen at the camp had made their main concern to say that such and such a person is a Kaafir and such and such a person is an apostate. So he gathered them together and said "Oh my sons, you came here to train and prepare, so do not concern yourselves with Takfeer, and leave it to the scholars".*

Links to the tweets:- [\(1\)](#) - [\(2\)](#)

Uthaymeen in order to be sent to Iraq for Jihad³⁷. But there are also groups who do not immediately deal with this disease or even try to treat it, and so it takes root and spreads inside the group, and then suddenly you see its leaders coming under pressure from a lobby of the extremists, and they get compelled to adopt their ideology, or they revolt against it as had happened with the GIA in Algeria when the group with Zaytouni carried out a coup against the leadership and took control of the group and then imposed their ideology on the group as a whole³⁸.

ISIS is amongst those groups that did not deal with this extremism from the beginning, and so it gradually spread within its ranks. I guess without me being absolutely sure, that the leadership felt confused in front of its soldiers who used to exaggerate in Takfeer, and they were afraid to appear weak in front of them, and so they tried to get along with them so that they may prevent them from going further to the point of making Takfeer upon themselves, so that the issue will not aggravate soon to a situation of internal fighting.

1. What prompts me to say this are several things amongst which are: They espoused certain matters relating to Takfeer and then suddenly they began to say that those who espoused this are deviated!
2. What was stated by Abu Yazin Ash Shami - a member of the Shura council of Ahrar ash Sham- in the debate which took place between him and Abu

³⁷ A member of the Shariah committee of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Maysarah al Ghareeb said: *"I met a brother from Sham who had recently entered Iraq. He told me about an incident that occurred to him, which in brief was that prior to his entry into Iraq he had met a brother who came from the Arabian Peninsula, at one of the guest houses. And while they were eating, the coordinator asked the brothers about their beliefs regarding Bin Baz and Ibn Uthaymeen, and it became clear to him that the brother from the Peninsula did not make Takfeer on them. So this host was surprised at that and he rebuked the brother, telling him that Shaykh Abu Mus'ab makes Takfeer on them both and that the one who does not make Takfeer on them will not enter the land of Jihad. At that, the brother asked in amazement "So you are stopping me from entering Iraq?" and the host said "Yes", and he did what he threatened him of doing and he sent him back to where he had come from. But the brother who spoke to me was afraid and he did not say his opinion regarding the matter due to his fear that he also will be prevented from entering the land of Jihad and Ribat. I immediately raised the case to our Shaykh (Zarqawi), may Allah have mercy on him, especially since he had entrusted me to tell him everything that was happening in the field due to his fear that his followers may not be able to reach him because of him remaining hidden for the sake of security. So he became very much angry and threatened the one who attributed an opinion to him which he did not believe in, and ordered his deputy to investigate this matter and if it was found to be true, then to expel the host from the group. Then the Shaykh told me "It is true that I consider them as having misled the Ummah by their Fatwas, but I do not make Takfeer on them. By Allah, even if the brother from the Peninsula does not make Takfeer on (King) Fahad, I would still not prevent him from Jihad. Many have entered Iraq who do not make Takfeer on the Saudi government."* [Al Zarqawi as I knew him" -3/6 released by Al Furqan Foundation]

³⁸ Shaykh Atiyatullah who was at that time in Algeria spoke on the details of a coup led by Jamaal Zaytouni (Abu Abdur Rahman Ameen) against the leadership of the group by putting pressure on the media official to issue a statement under the name of the Shura council stating that the previous leader had been removed and Zaytouni has been appointed in his place and he spread it quickly to the battalions and to the brigades for the matter to become firmly established. Then he met with the actual leader and the Shura council and refused to step down saying *"what will decide between me and you is killing"*. So they stepped down and left their leadership to him to prevent bloodshed. (Refer to the book: "The Algerian experience", by Atiyatullah, P.16)

Muhammad Al Adnani and a group of Shariah officials in ISIS after announcing their state in Sham, when one of those who were present there mentioned that we have become forced to be defensive and are under pressure from our soldiers after Sheikh Al-Zawahiri began to address Morsi with the title 'Doctor' Morsi! So they are attacking and we are defending³⁹.

So it is clear that this group ISIS is trying to silence all of its soldiers who oppose them who are accusing them of being weak. Thus their policies stemmed from reactions due to the behavior of these soldiers, and they confronted extremism with a counter extremism.

However, before we speak about the issue of Takfeer on the 'Aadhir' we must clarify the concept which states 'There is no excuse for ignorance in the issue of major Shirk'.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab explained the writings of some of the scholars before him saying that a Muslim who falls into major Shirk is not excused due to ignorance or misinterpretation. In fact, he is only excused in one case only and that is when he is compelled or really forced by the enemies. For example:

If I prostrate to a grave and supplicate to the dead person that is in the grave and I say to the dead person *"Oh Ali, make my matters easy for me and help me."*

From amongst the acts of worship which should be for Allah alone is prostration and supplication for needs which no one except Allah is capable of fulfilling. So when you stand and prostrate to other than Allah, this means that you have made someone else a partner with Allah in a matter that should not be made for anyone except for Allah alone.

So then now you have fallen into Shirk (by associating partners with Allah).

And if I am ignorant that this action is Shirk (associating partners to Allah), will Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab excuse me for this ignorance? The answer is no. And if I did this due to a misinterpretation thinking that this person is an intermediary between me and Allah, will Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab excuse me for this misinterpretation? The answer is no.

But he will excuse me if a group of people came and threatened me with weapons and they were serious in their threats and I was unable to escape from them, and they said to me *"prostrate to this grave or else we will kill you"*. So here it is allowed to prostrate as long as you hate to do this action. And this is the only case in which I will be excused by Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab.

³⁹ Refer to 'The details of the debate with the group ISIS' by Shaykh Abu Yazan ash Shami, with comments by the previous head of the Shariah office in Ahrar ash Sham, Shaykh Abu Muhammad as Saadiq P.6

But why will I not be excused in the first two cases? It is because Allah has warned from Shirk in a very clear manner in the Quran in verses which are easily understandable. So whichever person the Quran has reached, he has received the Hujjah (clear message) and it is not necessary to further clarify it for him. So based upon this, whoever the Quran has reached, he has received the Hujjah (the clear message).

So the matter of making Takfeer on a Muslim if he commits major Shirk is a matter which was agreed upon by the Salafi school (or as known in the west as the Wahhabis) generation after generation. It was only after the establishment of the third Saudi state (the current one) that this matter got reviewed again, and now we find different points of view⁴⁰. Despite that, some Saudi official religious figures still support this juristic view. For example:

- The member of the committee of the senior scholars (Kibaar ul Ulama), Dr. Saalih al Fawzan, who has written an introduction to two books '*Daabit Takfeer al Mu'ayyan*' and '*Aarid al Jahl*' by Shaykh Rashid Abul Alaa, which are amongst the books which are being circulated in the Saudi prisons.
- And also the member of the '*Presidency of Scientific Research, Fatwas, propagation and guidance*' (Riaasath al Buhooth al Ilmiyya wal Iftaa wa Da'wah wal Irshad), Shaykh Ibn Jibreen when he wrote an introduction to the book '*Al Udhr Bil Jahl Tahta al Mihjar Ash Shari'e*' by Shaykh Mad'hat al Farraj which is also one of the books circulated in the Saudi prisons.

So the Salafi schools and trends even if they conflict in some matters, they however are in agreement in the others.

But if every group and lobby within ISIS adopts this position of not excusing the ignorant person in the matters of major Shirk, then what is the problem?

The disagreement is in one issue only, and it has a relation to the legitimacy of ISIS and its leader.

It is the issue of Takfeer ul Aadhir (making Takfeer on the one who excuses the ignorant) and a series of chain Takfeer based on this.

Let us give an example: 'Sulayman' does an act of Shirk and so he is a Mushrik Kaafir according to all these groups with no disagreement. However, 'Ahmed' does not make Takfeer on this 'Sulayman' because of some doubt he has in this matter. Here they get divided into two groups - The group with Turki Bin'ali says that Ahmed does not become a Kaafir except after clarifying the matter to him regarding Sulayman's action of Shirk

⁴⁰ From those major scholars during the period of the third Saudi State who adopted a somewhat different view are: Ibn As-Sa'adi who wrote on that in (Fataawa as-Sa'adi, P.447) and Ibn Uthaymeen in (Sharh Kashf Shubuhaat, P.37)

and the doubts have been removed and the matter has been explained to him. (This act of clarifying is known as providing the Hujjah).

So Turki Bin'ali says about the person who does not make Takfeer on a Mushrik or a Kaafir: ***"As for the one to whom it has become clear through evidences from the Sharia about the Kufr (disbelief) of a person and then he still did not make Takfeer on him, he is a Kaafir"***⁴¹. So it also becomes understood from this statement that the one to whom it has not become clear, it is not allowed to make Takfeer on him.

The Hazmi group would immediately make Takfeer on Ahmed without any need to clarify the matter to him and remove the doubts. In fact, they even make Takfeer on the one who does not make Takfeer on him!!

The Shariah official of 'The Islamic State' in Yemen, Abu Bilal al Harbi who was one of those who had previously been close to al Hazmi said ***"We are free from his latest Fitna (ordeal) which is to make Takfeer on the Aadhir (the excuser) and we believe that the one who excuses is not to be made Takfeer upon except after the matter has been made clear to him and the doubts have been removed. I asked al Hazmi about chain Takfeer and he said it goes up to the third person (i.e. Takfeer is made till the third person in the series of the one who excuses the one who excuses the one who excuses the one who commits Shirk – i.e. three people in the chain of excusers) and I asked him for the evidence that it is made till the third person only and he gave me no evidence for that"***⁴².

How does this disagreement affect the legitimacy of ISIS and its leader?

- The Shiah are Mushrikeen and Kuffar by the agreement of these people.
- Shaykh Ayman al Zawahiri does not make Takfeer on all the Shiah. He excuses their general masses and because of this he himself is a Kaafir Mushrik according to the Hazmi wing.
- Baghdad addressed al Zawahiri previously saying "May Allah protect him" and as 'The Shaykh the Mujahid', and this means that he does not make Takfeer on him.
- So then he (Baghdadi) himself is a Kaafir.

And if the leader is a Kaafir then it is not an Islamic State!

The second problem is that amongst many who do not speak the Arabic language and who speak in Russian and English, there is a matter that is spreading amongst them gradually, and appears to be taking root in them. And that is the issue of the Takfeer on

⁴¹ 'Al Kawkab Ad-Durrie Al Muneer', p.11, Sharh Nawaaqid Al Islam Al Ashrah, lesson 2 (50:00), Tawheed broadcast in the city of Sirte, 3rd August 2013

⁴² The letter: "Al Hazmi from a close look", p.5, 5th August, 2014

the Aadhir (on the excuser). ISIS has been spreading their propaganda strongly in these two languages and also amongst many who come to them especially those who speak Russian who have engrossed themselves deeply into this innovation of making Takfeer on the Aadhir. And the ranks of these people are gradually growing stronger inside ISIS due to many people who have this belief entering ISIS. And they are divided into three groups:

1. The first group is of those who have fought against ISIS⁴³.
2. The second are those who have disassociated from ISIS and are trying to split from it⁴⁴.
3. And a (third) group that is still within its ranks and spreading these thoughts.

Previously ISIS used a technique of eliminating the leaders of these people⁴⁵, but now it has gone out of control and these people who make Takfeer on the Aadhir have increased in large numbers, and it is difficult to deal with them all using the same method which was previously used when they were only a few.

Now we will deal with the final point, which is the statement attributed to ISIS regarding the issue of the Aadhir 'the excuser'⁴⁶.

The reality is that this statement does not agree with the bases of those who make Takfeer on the Aadhir, rather there are radical differences, such as:

- In the first page it demonstrated the mistake in the arguments of those who make Takfeer on the Aadhir since those who make Takfeer on the Aadhir say that the Aadhir becomes a Mushrik by not making Takfeer on the one who does an act of Shirk, whereas the statement says that this argument is wrong because we don't say that the one who does Shirk and the one who does not do it are equal, and this argument will necessarily lead to chain Takfeer.

⁴³ For example Abu Mu'az al Aasmi, one of the former soldiers of ISIS who were imprisoned previously in the prison of Raqqa and fled after the US bombed it, wrote an article on 3rd October 2016 entitled '[*The reality of the clash at Aleppo and the cowardice of the soldiers of Al Baghdadi, the Taghut of Shaam*](#)', and in it he mentioned about a fight that took place between this group and Baghdadi's group in the city of Al Baab and then at a farm between Al Raii and Jarablus.

⁴⁴ Al Aasmi also stated in the above mentioned article that "After Allah guided a group of Muhajireen brothers towards Tawheed in the city of Al Baab, in Aleppo, the security apparatus of the 'Idols' State' began to plot against them after they saw that the call towards Tawheed had reached everyone and the one who has not been guided towards it would leave fighting until he gets clarification and searches for the truth".

⁴⁵ On 16th August 2014 a statement was published entitled "[*Aiding the imprisoned brothers in the Kaafirs' Jahmiyyah State*](#) in which it was stated that these:- "(Abu Ja'far al Hattaab, Abu Mus'ab At-Tunisi, Abu Usayd al Maghribi, Abul Hawraa al Jazaairi, Abu Khalid Ash-Sharqi, Abu Abdullah al Maghribi and Abu Umar al Kuwaiti) have been arrested by ISIS for making Takfeer on the Aadhir, and since the past two years their fate has been unknown, and it is likely they have been executed."

⁴⁶ It is the statement number 155, issued by 'Al Maktab al Maqreezi Li Mutaaba'ah Ad-Dawaween Ash-Shariea', on 25th May 2016.

- In the second page ISIS forbade the use of certain terms such as “the foundation” and “necessary implications” in the meaning of “there is no God but Allah” and “Kufr bi Taghut” and the term “Takfeer on the Aadhir” whereas these terms are the central themes of those who propagate Takfeer on the Aadhir.
- And in the third page it says that the issue of Takfeer on the Aadhir is an issue which changes depending on the circumstances and it is not always the same. Sometimes the person who doesn’t make Takfeer on the Mushrik does not become a Kaafir because the matter is unclear and ignorance is widespread and propagation is weak and doubts are widespread. So here it is necessary to clarify the matter (i.e. provide the Hujjah), and if he still abstains from making Takfeer after the matter has been clarified then he will become a Kaafir. This is contrary to the beliefs of those who make Takfeer on the Aadhir who do not accept these kinds of excuses which can prevent Takfeer. Rather, they make Takfeer even on the one who abstains from Takfeer even at a time when ignorance is widespread, propagation is weak and doubts are common.
- Also, in the third page, they said that there is an exception which is during a situation in which there is an Islamic state which preaches Tawheed and renounces Shirk “like our state now” (as per their claim). So here there does not exist anything that can prevent Takfeer on the one who does not make Takfeer on the Mushrikeen, because the matter has become clear (in an Islamic state). Even though both the groups would reach the same conclusion here, the arguments taken from the Shariah by both the groups to view the matter, are different. ISIS applies this ruling inside their borders only, which would mean that this is not applicable to those outside ISIS, because there the voice of Islam is not loud enough or there does not exist an Islamic state which calls towards renouncing Shirk and towards Tawheed, as per their claim. So based upon this, this ruling applies only in areas under their control and does not extend to the rest of the lands. And this is contrary to the arguments of those who make Takfeer on the Aadhir, who as we have stated in the previous point do not give any consideration to such differences in circumstances.
- However, in the fourth page they used flexible terms which can take many meanings. They say in it that it is necessary for the preacher in the Islamic State to remove the doubts in abstaining from Takfeer on the Mushrikeen, but in the previous page they say that this is a clear and evident matter! So I do not know how this matter can be clarified to the people when it is already a clear matter! As if they are still dealing with it as if it is an unclear matter!!!

So ISIS has two solutions, and each one is equally difficult.

To formally adopt the belief of making Takfeer on the Aadhir in the form put forward by those who make Takfeer on the Aadhir. And by that they will have given to their

opponents in the other Islamic groups such as Al Qaida the proof that they are extremists who have no connection to the Jihadi methodology and its previous Shaykhs, in a clearer manner than before. This will weaken their propaganda amongst their supporters abroad.

Be silent or oppose this thinking, which will increase the numbers within its ranks by new members joining them or by being convinced of it, who will then become an obstacle for them, destroying them from the inside, whether they refrain from fighting or they fight against ISIS themselves for not adopting their view.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF ANSWER BY TORE HAMMING

Even in Jihadi circles the issue of takfeer (excommunication) is a delicate matter. Scholars and Jihadi leaders, including Usama bin Laden and Abu Yahya al-Libi, have continuously emphasized that Takfeer should be applied extremely cautiously as it is a complicated matter that should be left for the knowledgeable people only to decide upon.

The use of Takfeer is probably the main issue causing fragmentation between Sunni Jihadi groups, both now and in the previous decades. After the Jalalabad defeat in 1989, proponents of a more extensive use of Takfeer started to appear, especially within the Algerian community, and it developed within the Groupe Islamique Armé in Algeria in the 1990s resulting in severe conflict between Jihadi groups and individuals.

I have myself described the disagreement within the Islamic State in a post here on Jihadica ([See article](#)), but due to the complexity of the matter, I have found myself confused on a regular basis trying to understand the Islamic State position on Takfeer (and Takfeer on the excuser). Ahmad Al Hamdan does a good job explaining the problem the Islamic State is facing internally as it seeks to avoid extremism in Takfeer while, at the same time, managing its followers with an extreme on Takfeer. Giving in to the extremists within its ranks could lead to [self-destruction](#) as prophesized by Nelly Lahoud.

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